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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses collaboration as a process that can be used to support adult learners and families. The article distinguishes between collaboration, coordination, and cooperation; suggests ways to find collaborators; lists factors that promote or hinder collaboration; and provides guidelines for working with collaborators. A section on how to do stakeholder mapping (a method used to assess the possible impact of all stakeholders on a given set of goals or a specific plan of action in order to manage change, anticipate opposition from dissatisfied groups, and identify outsiders who may support the change), and a list of eight critical characteristics of successful community collaborators is included. The paper also contains a self-assessment form for rating 18 facets of collaborative behavior and a partner survey to determine the state of communication among collaborators. (KC)

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Enhancing Adult Literacy in Ohio

Program Resources

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Collaboration: Working Together To Support Families

Nancy Padak and Connie Sapin

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J. Bowlings

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

It's 8:00 Friday morning. Seated around a table are 9 focused people who contribute their expertise to support the 25 DHS/OWF clients that are currently active in a Workforce Training Program. All have direct contact with the clients; all are regular contributors to this monthly meeting. Each person, both as an individual and as a representative of another agency or program, is committed to empowering clients to become self-sufficient. According to the leader of this group, the key has been the development of mutual respect, an understanding and trust developed through regular interaction, giving up on "turf" issues, and focusing on what is best for clients. Individually and collectively, these people view themselves as a team that is helping to change lives. As the team leader notes, "All of us know that we couldn't do it without all of us."

In another area of the state, a number of educational institutions and social service agencies in a large county have been working toward implementation of a county-wide, cooperative program that will provide "one-stop" service. The leader of this effort notes that the history of the program, to date, has been a study in the challenges associated with establishing collaborative partnerships. As an example, she notes, "The old adage, 'nature abhors a vacuum,' holds true in our county as it does throughout the universe. Perhaps even more so with school buildings. During the initial planning for our program, the six collaborating school districts offered space in their facilities to house the one-stop centers. When the time came to establish the centers, space was no longer available at three of the original sites. So our development team is now faced with the challenge of locating alternative sites for those three centers."

Collaboration, one-stop service centers, partnerships– these ideas are frequently expressed as goals for family literacy programs. And for good reason. Well developed collaborative partnerships offer coordinated support to families. But effective collaboration doesn't happen by chance. In this publication we offer some suggestions for establishing and maintaining effective collaborations.

What Is Collaboration?

Collaboration is often confused with other forms of agency interaction– cooperation and coordination. *Cooperation* usually describes an informal sharing relationship, such as two agencies providing referrals for each other or sharing information about learner needs. Agencies that cooperate ordinarily do not make joint decisions or provide services together, but they do communicate in order to limit duplication of services.

Coordination refers to a more highly developed association in which organizations or agencies have informal agreements about program development and in-kind contributions but do not, as a rule, commit money and other resources to one another. Nevertheless, coordinated associations are generally more formal and better defined than cooperative arrangements.

The term *collaboration* is reserved for organizations that join together to create a new entity. Together these organizations work to accomplish a shared vision by building an interdependent system to address issues and opportunities. Ordinarily the agencies involved sign formal agreements that address determination of goals, problem-solving processes, areas of authority, financing, and other issues related to the governance of the new entity.

Collaboration also occurs at a variety of levels: national, state, or corporate; local community; program site. National, state, or corporate policies and regulations may provide incentives or even mandates for collaboration. Collaboration at the community level often aims to enhance program integrity. Program-level collaboration may involve staff members working together to support program success, a process that works best if families are part of the team as well.

Finding Collaborators

The best way to find community collaborators is to begin with a careful needs assessment of the families in the program. The next step is to explore possible partnerships with agencies that can meet those needs. Here is a list of possible partners:

Adult Basic and Literacy Education
Boards of Education
Booksellers
Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts

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Civic Groups (e.g., Rotary, Altrusa, Kiwanis)
Colleges/ Universities
Corporations
Corrections Facilities
Day Care Centers
Employment Commissions
Even Start Programs
4-H Clubs
Head Start Programs
Health Services
Hospitals/ Clinics
Housing Authorities
Humanities Councils
Job Training Programs
Libraries
Media (Newspapers, TV, Radio)
Parent-Teacher Associations/Organizations
Parks and Recreation Departments
Professional Organizations
Reading Councils
Religious Groups
Retired Senior Volunteer Programs
Senior Citizens' Centers
Service Organizations (e.g., Junior League, Jaycees)
Social Service Agencies
Unions
United Way
Veterans Groups
Volunteer Centers, Voluntary/Action Agencies
Women's Shelters
Workplaces/ Local Businesses
YMCAs/YWCAs

Jane Meyer, an experienced collaborator (Canton ABLE, Canton Even Start), recommends developing a system for organizing agency information: who are the leaders, what are the agency goals, how are the agencies funded, etc. This information can help family literacy personnel understand both the politics within which potential partners operate and the literacy-related outcomes likely to be valued by the partners. A simple chart or matrix can be developed to organize this information.

Working With Collaborators

Once collaboration with other agencies has been explored, the directors or their representatives meet to determine the vision, goals, fiscal responsibilities, and plan of action. Collaborations are complex, and many factors influence their success or failure. The following lists, which detail factors that can help or hinder collaborations, can be used to identify promising partners or even to trouble-shoot a partnership in "distress."

Factors which promote collaboration

- Perception that the collaboration is needed
- Benefits outweigh the costs
- Positive attitudes
- Consensus between administrators and staff
- Players see each other as valuable sources/resources
- Ability to maintain program identity, prestige, and power
- Reward system for staff who reinforce the collaboration
- Accessibility to other organizations
- Positive evaluations of other organizations and their staffs
- Similarity or overlap in resources and goals
- Common commitment to families, parents and their children
- Common definitions, ideologies, interests and approaches
- Perception of partial interdependence
- Good history of relations
- Standardized procedures across organizations
- Occupational diversity of staff that is complementary
- Leaders favor the collaboration
- Chances exist for regular contact and exchange of information
- Existence of boundary-crossing roles
- Compatibility or similarity of organizations structures

Factors which can hinder collaborations

- Vested interest of program or other agencies
- Perception of threat, competition for resources or clients
- Perception of loss of program identity
- Perception of loss of prestige or role as "authority"
- Lower service effectiveness
- Alienation of some families
- Inability to serve new families who would be drawn to the program
- Differing leadership styles
- Differing professional background of staff
- Disparities in staff training
- Difference in priorities, ideologies, outlooks, or goals for families
- Lack of a common "language"
- Staff members don't favor the collaboration
- Negative evaluations of other organizations
- Imperfect knowledge of other agencies in the community
- Poor history of relations
- Costs (resources, staff time) outweigh benefits
- Lack of communication among higher level staff
- Bureaucracies that inhibit internal, external communication
- Centralization of authority, "red tape"
- Little staff time devoted to boundary-crossing roles
- Differences in priorities, goals, tasks
- High staff turnover
- Other organizations have little to offer

After individual organizations have worked out who will contribute what to the program, it's important to solidify agreements in writing. These formal written statements should include the shared mission, goals, and outcomes of the project, as well as the following:

- a detailed description of services to be provided
- the designation of leadership roles, names, and responsibilities
- sources of funding, financial responsibilities, in-kind contributions

- information about channels of communication, types and times of meetings, and conflict resolution procedures
- a specified time period for the agreement and conditions for its renewal.

Although conflicts are probably unavoidable, consensus decision-making can minimize their influence on the long-term health of the partnership. In consensus decision-making, the group works for solutions that everyone can "live with." In other words, the group works toward substantial agreement, not necessarily unanimity. The following guidelines, adapted from *Alternative Environmental Conflict Management Approaches* (University of Michigan, 1986), have helped collaborative groups make decisions through consensus:

- Don't worry about 100% approval. Rather the goal should be an agreement that everyone can live with. Avoid techniques such as majority vote, averaging, or trading.
- Individuals need to accept responsibility for listening and being heard. Everyone should be able to speak; no one should block or squelch the opinions of others. People should avoid arguing for "the fun of it" or to "win."
- Try to base decisions on objective criteria or an agreed-upon rationale. View differences of opinion as a help, not a hindrance, to good decision making.
- Everyone should monitor progress and make suggestions if the group isn't progressing. It's OK to reduce tension through humor or to take breaks as long as meaningful disagreements are not ignored.
- No one should agree to a solution just to avoid conflict.

Collaborative teams may wish to evaluate their functioning from time to time, especially when the group has difficulty. An adaptation of the following chart may be useful for gathering opinions on the source of problems.

Evaluating our Collaborative Behavior

Please rate our team's behavior on the items below using the following scale:

5 - Excellent
4 - Good
3 -Average
2 - Needs Improvement
1 - Lacking

Rating	Collaborative Behavior
	1. All team members know the purpose of the meeting and tasks are stated clearly.
	2. Team members share work and responsibility.
	3. All team members are prepared for meetings.
	4. Team roles are flexible as needed to achieve team goals.
	5. Written records of team meetings and decisions are kept and shared with all team members.
	6. Tasks are assigned to team members who then know who will do what, when, where, and how.
	7. The input and expertise of each team member is valued and respected.
	8. Each team member has the opportunity and support to share information and ask questions.
	9. Team members are willing to listen when different ideas are expressed or hard questions are asked.
	10. Disagreements are handled openly in a way that contributes to the understanding of the situation.
	11. Team members invite input from others.
	12. Team members provide accurate, objective feedback that improves the decision-making process.
	13. Team members consistently acknowledge and discuss feedback.
	14. Team members consistently respond to the contributions of all.
	15. Team members interrupt the questions or comments of others only if it is to comply with time limits.
	16. Team members consistently focus on the resolution of problems and concerns.
	17. Team members select priorities together.
	18. Team members reach consensus on decisions.

From: *What every child needs: A caring community.* Oxford, OH: Community Services Action Committee, Miami University, 1998, 6:41.

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Formal, annual evaluations of collaborations can help identify problems at a stage where they can be solved without destroying the partnership. In addition, individuals in the partnerships can share evaluation results with the agencies they represent. A simple survey, such as the following (adapted from RCS Even Start Partner Survey), is completed quickly but provides useful information.

Communication Among Collaborators: Partner Survey

Name_____ Title_____

Agency_____ Date_____

Please use a scale of 1-5 for items 1-5: 1=a great deal; 5=not at all.

1. My knowledge about collaboration Rating_____
2. The degree to which collaboration is helping parents achieving [goal 1] Rating_____
3. How did your learn about the collaboration?
4. How does your agency assist the collaboration?
5. How does the collaboration assist your agency?
6. What are the strengths of the collaboration?
7. What suggestions can you provide for strengthening the collaboration?
8. Please provide any additional comments.

Stakeholder Mapping

True collaborations are new entities within a community. As collaborations begin to achieve goals, "business as usual" may change. For those involved in the collaboration, this change is most likely desired, but others may have different opinions. Consider, for example, a classroom teacher who must share his/her space. Or an existing but less-than-effective program that fears its weaknesses will be exposed if collaborative is successful. Or a community group opposed to the idea of this sort of program.

Every organization is subject to the influence of groups and individuals who function outside of it or who interact with the organization from the outside. These groups and individuals, or stakeholders, believe that they have a legitimate stake in the organization because the organization affects their lives in some way.

Stakeholder Mapping is a method to assess the possible impact of all stakeholders on a given set of goals or a specific plan of action. It is a method for managing change, for anticipating opposition from dissatisfied groups and for identifying outsiders who may support the change. The Stakeholder Mapping process involves several steps:

- State the organizational objectives. Describe the nature of the specific objectives or planned changes.
- Brainstorm stakeholders.
- Create a chart that lists objectives along one dimension and stakeholders along the other. Consider each stakeholder's likely opinion about each objective, using a 5-point scale (very positive–very negative).
- Consider each stakeholder's power with respect to a) whether or not the objectives are adopted and b) how the objectives will be implemented.
- Consider who each stakeholder influences and also who might influence the stakeholder.

Rethink solutions to increase implementation chances. Steps 3, 4, and 5 in the mapping process yield a summary of stakeholders' positions and power, as well as current or potential coalitions. Examine this summary, and look for ways to decrease opposition (especially among powerful stakeholders) or increase power among supporters (e.g., by forming coalitions). The best strategies are those that result in cooperation from powerful, influential groups.

Keys to Successful Collaboration

In 1995, NALD conducted an interview study of five successful community partnerships in Alberta, Canada, which identified 8 critical characteristics:

- Communication– Partners communicated frequently and honestly. They shared common language about

issues related to the partnership. They made publicizing and communicating about successes a high priority.

- Adequate Resources– Successful partnerships have access to adequate time, enough money, and necessary materials and information to work effectively.
- Proper Planning– Community needs assessments help create the mission for successful collaborations. Other planning-related issues include staff supervision and professional development, program evaluation, and overall coordination.
- Shared Values and Goals– The core values that drive the partnership must be jointly established and must reflect the community and its residents. All members of the partnership must be committed to these collective goals.
- Participation– Partners need significant, active roles; token participation (e.g., attending meetings only) is not recommended.
- Leadership– Despite the need for active participation and collaboration, successful partnerships have strong leaders. These leaders have the ability to develop strong interpersonal relationships; they also have high levels of "initiative."
- Flexibility– Successful partnerships require many kinds of flexibility: scheduling meetings, adjusting roles and responsibilities, adapting to changes in planning and implementation, accepting differences in philosophy. Common interdisciplinary professional development sessions help groups develop this flexibility.
- Trust and Respect– Strong, sustainable partnerships are built on trust and respect. Partners respect each other, and all partners respect the adult learners that the collaborations serve.

At the organization level, collaboration works best when it is mutually beneficial. At the local implementation level it works best when staff invests in relationships with partners. Ideally, collaborators should be involved in the identification of objectives and the evaluation of outcomes. Other points to remember about collaboration (adapted from Bruner, 1991) include

- Collaboration is not an easy, quick, fix-all solution to societal problems.
- Collaboration should not be a program's ultimate goal but rather a tool used to serve families.
- Interagency collaboration is time-consuming and process-intensive and should only be attempted when the potential benefits are significant.
- Institutions do not collaborate– people do. Time must be provided, and staff members must be rewarded for their participation and effort in the collaboration.
- Collaboration must be engaged in holistically; creative, effective, and real solutions to shared problems will ensure the longevity of a partnership.

For More Information

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